

# VU Research Portal

## Tot zonde gemaakt

van den Brink, G.A.

2016

### **document version**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

### **citation for published version (APA)**

van den Brink, G. A. (2016). *Tot zonde gemaakt: De Engelse antinomianse controverse (1690-1700) over de toerekening van de zonden aan Christus, met bijzondere aandacht voor Herman Witsius Animadversiones Irenicae (1696)*. [Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam].

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

### **E-mail address:**

[vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl](mailto:vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl)

# SUMMARY

*Christ Made Sin*  
*The English Antinomian Controversy (1690-1700)*  
*about the Imputation of Sin to Christ, with Special Attention*  
*for Herman Witsius's Animadversiones Irenicae (1696)*

At the end of the seventeenth century, a fierce debate takes place among the so-called dissenters or nonconformists about the doctrines of satisfaction and justification. This debate is usually called the third antinomian controversy. One party accuses their opponents of being against the law (*anti-nomos*, therefore antinomians), while their contestants respond by leveling the accusation that the first party is perverting the gospel into a new law (*neo-nomos*, therefore neonomians). The Dutch theologian Herman Witsius (1636-1708) tries to mediate between these groups by writing his *Animadversiones Irenicae* (1696).

This study aims to provide a conceptual analysis of the English antinomian controversy (1690-1700) about the imputation of sin to Christ, in the light of preceding developments in the history of doctrine, with special reference to Herman Witsius's *Animadversiones Irenicae* (1696). The central issue pertains to the imputation of sin to Christ.

It is necessary, therefore, to map the conceptual context of imputation, not only synchronically, but also diachronically. Various facets of the concept of imputation converge out of the earlier debates between Reformed theologians and Roman Catholics, Socinians and Arminians. In addition, two other antinomian controversies occurred earlier in that century, (1636-1638 in New England and 1640-1648 in England).

The research makes clear that the concept of imputation coheres with several other concepts: law, sin, right, punishment, remission, justice and proportionality. The interdependence of these eight concepts makes it possible to distinguish three coherent positions, exemplified in the work of Piscator, Wotton and Owen. Neonomianism aligns closely with the position of Wotton. Antinomianism appears to be a separate position, distinguished from the other three, whereas Witsius favours the position of Owen.

The core of this research is presented in chapters 4-7, which explain the diverse use of the terminology employed by Roman Catholic, Socinian, Arminian and Reformed theologians in the seventeenth century, specifically the concepts of imputation (chapter 4), maintenance of the

law (chapter 5), punishment and remission (chapter 6), and justice and proportionality with regard to the measure of punishment (chapter 7). In addition, these chapters investigate the question of how this diversity influences the antinomian controversy, highlighting the respective stance of the antinomians, neonomians and the position of Witsius in his attempt to mediate between them.

*Chapter 1* presents the goal of this study, and the current state of the research. Much recent historical research regarding antinomianism within Reformed theology focuses on the antinomianism in New England (1636-1638) and on the antinomianism in England (1640-1648). The third antinomian controversy (1690-1700), which is the object of this study, has received considerably less attention, despite its obvious impact in the eighteenth century. Scarcely any literature exists on the development of the concept of imputation (*imputatio*) during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Next, this chapter provides some methodological considerations. Many studies about antinomianism use a so-called “realistic” method of historiography, which regards theological debates as epiphenomena that supervene on social, political or psychological events. This often results in a reductionist analysis of the debates. Examples of this method include the studies of Como, Bozeman, Cooper and Parnham.

The methodology of this study, however, builds on the recent research in Reformed scholasticism presented in the writings of W.J. van Asselt, A.J. Beck, J. Coffey, A.C. Denlinger, R.A. Muller and others. Scholasticism is regarded as an instrument, not as an issue of content. Utilizing the approach of Quentin Skinner, this study applies the principle of “seeing things their way” by regarding thinkers as rational persons who intend to put their position into words coherently and consistently. Thus, both a “realist” and an “idealist” approach are avoided. Convictions and conceptions do not have their autonomous influence in history without concrete persons (“idealism”), but neither can they be reduced to naturalistic factors (“realism”).

*Chapter 2* describes the development of the antinomian controversy (1690-1700). The Glorious Revolution (1689) provides the nonconformists with the opportunity for their own theological education. In order to implement this, Presbyterians and Congregationalists collaborate in a joint effort called the *Happy Union*. The unity, however, breaks down over the republication of the sermons of Tobias Crisp. The Presbyterian, Daniel Williams, condemns the sermons as antinomian, and the Congrega-

tionalist, Isaac Chauncy, responds by defending Crisp and accusing Williams of neonomianism.

The antinomians present themselves as the defenders of free grace and of the Reformed heritage. The appeal to the theology of Calvin, and especially of Luther, is an important mark of antinomianism. The antinomians also seek support from the antinomian writers in the prior half century. The fierce rejection of righteousness by works characterizes doctrinal antinomianism, placing rather the full emphasis on the graciousness of salvation. This finds expression in their conviction regarding the exchange of person between Christ and the sinner. According to the antinomians, Christ became the acting person in the sinner, and the sinner becomes the one who undergoes Christ's passion, both of these taking place by commutation. The distinction between the impetration and the application of salvation, therefore, loses its significance for the antinomians.

It is important to note that neonomianism is shaped by the opinions of Hugo Grotius. In 1617, Grotius publishes *De Satisfactione*, wherein he opposes Socinus' critique of the Reformed doctrine of satisfaction. In Reformed circles, Grotius' publication receives much appreciation as well as much criticism. The question during the following decades pertains to whether Grotius might have conceded too much to Socinianism. His influence is particularly notable in Richard Baxter, resulting in the often synonymous use of "Neonomianism" and "Baxterianism". Neonomianism is characterized by the conviction that the gospel is a law, having its own precepts and threats. According to some, the gospel is viewed as a new law, which replaced the old one. An important aspect of neonomianism is that it denies the imputation of sins qua sins to Christ, rather asserting only the imputation of the effects of sin (i.e., of punishment) to Christ.

Herman Witsius tries to mediate between these factions with his *Animadversiones Irenicae*. Witsius, professor in Franeker, Utrecht and Leiden, holds an international reputation, established by the publication of his *De Oeconomia Foederum*. Both the antinomians and neonomians send books to him, and a perusal of his *Animadversiones* proves that he had read at least some of the books of Crisp, Chauncy and Williams. Witsius does not give his full consent, however, to either of the two quarrelling parties. Although Witsius' influence in the antinomian controversy itself is modest, his publication receives a certain degree of popularity during the eighteenth century.

Chapter 3 provides a diachronic overview of the development in the meaning of the concept of imputation, from Erasmus' *Novum Instrumentum* (1516) through the year 1600. In the wake of the Reformation, the

concept of imputation becomes a technical term. Up until then, the term has a more fluid meaning, with various semantic contents attached to it. An important question regards the relationship between *reputatio* and *imputatio*. Luther seems to use *imputatio* for imputation *in malam partem* (i.e., imputation of sins) and *reputatio* for imputation *in bonam partem* (i.e., imputation of righteousness). In 1516, Erasmus proposes another distinction. He considers *imputatio* to be a mere mental act, which does not correspond with reality. He identifies this with *acceptilatio*, a term derived from Roman law, wherein a creditor declares to have received a payment, although in reality he has not.

Several influential studies (e.g., McGrath) claim that Erasmus' interpretation offers material for Melanchthon's doctrine of justification. Erasmus is the first to distinguish between *reputare* and *imputare*, and Melanchthon should accordingly have defined justification as an *acceptilatio*. This, however, appears to be incorrect. Very few Protestant theologians adopt the term *acceptilatio* as description for God's act in justification. On the other hand, however, viewing imputation as a judgment which is not in accordance with reality finds a broad reception among Protestant theologians in the notion that God declares a person just who is actually not just. In such a view, the concept of imputation supplies an additional argument for the graciousness of justification.

Up until approximately the beginning of the seventeenth century, imputation is seen as consisting of two things: estimation and treatment (e.g., Piscator). According to Piscator, when God imputes sins to Christ, He reckons that Christ did commit these sins, and God treats him accordingly by punishing Him. At around the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, dissatisfaction grows with this view of imputation. The fact that both Socinus and Arminius adopt Piscator's position on the concept of imputation fuels levels of discomfort. Socinus uses the definition of imputation to deny the necessity of satisfaction, and Arminius states that imperfect faith itself is imputed, God reckoning it as being perfect. In order to fight the Socinian and Arminian views, a revision of the conceptual content of imputation is seen to be necessary.

From around 1600, most Reformed theologians see imputation as consisting of not two but three issues: communication, estimation and treatment. This position is outlined in the writings of John Owen. In Owen's view, the communication of sins precedes God's estimation and treatment. When the sins of the faithful are imputed to Christ, these sins are, in a certain sense, communicated to Him. Consequently, He is reputed as guilty, and God treats Him accordingly by punishing Him. This different interpretation of imputation produces an important impli-

cation, namely that God's estimation is in accordance with the truth. As a result of the communication of sin to Christ, God rightly reckons Christ as a guilty one.

Nevertheless, others like Grotius and Wotton reject this view. They find the thought unacceptable that Christ could rightly be reckoned as guilty. Instead, they assert that only the effects or consequences of sin are imputed to Christ, not the sins themselves. God does indeed treat Christ as if He were a guilty sinner, but He does not reckon Him as being truly so, for the sins are not communicated to Him. Only the effect of sin, which is punishment, is communicated and imputed to Christ. In this view, the word imputation is used indefinitely; it is merely another word for communication.

From the beginning of the seventeenth century, therefore, three disparate views of the concept of imputation exist, which can be categorized under the positions of Piscator, Wotton and Owen. Each of these positions can be distinguished by the relationship between communication, estimation and treatment.

*Chapter 4* compares the three aforementioned positions with those of the antinomians and the neonomians. The antinomians accuse the neonomians of denying imputation completely. Conversely, the neonomians charge the antinomians with teaching that imputation is a physical transfer of sins to Christ (as if sin is a physical substance).

Those defending Owen's position rely on a differentiation in the concept of sin. Owen distinguishes five discrete aspects of sin: the act of sin, the stain of sin, potential guilt, actual guilt and the punishment of sin. By potential guilt, he intends the intrinsic obnoxiousness of every trespass; by actual guilt, the ordination to punishment. When sin is imputed, it is not communicated to Christ in every respect, but only in regard to the actual guilt. The neonomians state (aligning with the position of Wotton) that only the punishment is communicated, whereas the antinomians maintain that sin is transferred to Christ in all respects.

These differences influence opinions about God's estimation. The neonomians state that God reckons Christ neither as guilty nor as a sinner. Owen declares that God reckons Christ as guilty, but not as being intrinsically a sinner. According to the antinomians, God judges Christ as both guilty and as a sinner, because the act of the sin is also communicated to Christ. They therefore defend the view that God regards the sinner as the one who has done what Christ actually has done, and they view Christ as the one who committed the sins which in fact were executed by the sinner. In this point, the antinomians concur with the position of Piscator,

though an important distinction must be made. Piscator maintains that God's estimation is not according to truth, whereas the antinomians hold that it is according to truth.

It appears, therefore, that for a clear and accurate presentation of the antinomian position, it must be distinguished from the views of Piscator, Wotton and Owen. Conceptually, antinomianism should not be regarded as a subordinate variation of the position held by most Reformed theologians concerning the meaning of imputation. The neonomians align with the position of Wotton, as stated above.

Witsius attempts to conciliate the two factions by distinguishing between act, stain, guilt and punishment. He argues that the sins themselves were imputed to Christ, not only the consequences of the sins. This imputation of sin does not imply, however, that the act or the stain of sin were transferred to Christ. Rather, only the actual guilt (being the ordination unto punishment) is communicated to Christ and therefore removed from the sinner. Witsius rejects such a notion of commutation as if Christ became the acting person in the sins of the faithful.

*Chapter 5* addresses the maintenance of right and law. The distinction between both is brought to the fore by Grotius in his response to Socinus. Socinus regards God as an owner (*dominus*) who has both the right to punish as well as the right to forgive everyone. However, God never has the obligation to punish. Socinus maintains that God simply forgives the sins of those who repent and believe. Forgiveness does not include, however, the imputation of sin to anyone, whether to the believing sinner or to Christ. According to the Socinians, the old law which demanded eternal death for trespassing the law, is abolished and abrogated, and replaced by the new law of the gospel.

According to Grotius, however, God not only has the right to punish but also the obligation sometimes to punish. God is the ruler (*rector*) of the universe, maintaining order and stability in the world. So it is necessary for him to punish sin at least sometimes, in order to preserve his right as ruler (*ius rectoris*). Due to the death of Christ, God remits the sins of the faithful. The law is not abrogated, but the sanction of the law is not executed, which Grotius calls *dispensatio*. In short, Grotius does not base the necessity of the satisfaction in the maintenance of the execution of the law, but in the maintenance of God's right, namely his right as a ruler.

In Grotius' view, the imputation of sin does not play any role, since imputation would imply that God maintains his law by executing the punishment of the sin against Christ. That would involve a contradiction according to Grotius, because the law could only be maintained if the

sinner is punished in his own person. If Christ underwent the punishment vicariously, that would prove that God had decided not to maintain his law, but rather to grant a dispensation.

Grotius' plea for the necessity of the maintenance of God's right finds nearly universal consent among Reformed theologians. In contrast to Grotius, however, many of them state that God not only punishes sin sometimes, but that he is obligated to punish every sin. This obligation to punish all sins stems from the maintenance of God's law. The law of God threatens trespasses with death, and because this law is neither altered nor abrogated, punishment must follow every sin. Therefore, every sin is imputed, either to the sinner himself or to Christ. The first happens when a sinner does not believe, the second when he does believe. So, the necessity of punishing every sin and the conviction of the maintenance of the law presuppose each other. Many Reformed theologians defend both the necessity of the maintenance of the law, and the maintenance of God's right, and consequently, they reject the idea of a dispensation.

Nevertheless, there is difference of opinion regarding the question whether the necessity to maintain the law is hypothetical or absolute in nature. In the case of an absolute necessity, the necessity of the maintenance of the law is founded in God's nature. In the case of a hypothetical necessity, it is grounded in God's will. In order to confront Socinianism, a growing number of Reformed theologians adheres to the absolute necessity.

As noted above, Grotius taught that substitution and maintenance of the law exclude each other. Many Reformed theologians deny this, and they defend their view with the help of the concept of *epieikeia* (derived from Aristotle's *Ethica Nicomachea*). This concept is often translated as "benevolent interpretation [of the law]". If God would judge according to the strict demand of the law (*rigor legis*), substitution by the Mediator would indeed be impossible. But because the law does not prescribe that the sinner must bear the punishment in his own person, God as a ruler (*rector*) has the freedom to interpret his law in such a way that the law and the right of the ruler are maintained by means of a vicarious punishment. This study demonstrates the central role that *epieikeia* plays in seventeenth century Reformed soteriology, which is an important finding and contribution to current research.

In the antinomian controversy, the neonomians follow Grotius' view. They state that God applies a dispensation regarding those who believe and repent, and they consequently deny that God interprets the law according to *epieikeia*. The antinomians, on the other side, defend the maintenance of the law. Furthermore, they state that the faithful are



totally free from the law because it is perfectly fulfilled in Christ. Given their position on the commutation of personal actions between Christ and the sinner, they also do not use the concept of *epieikeia*.

Along with the majority of Reformed theologians, Witsius pleads for both the maintenance of God's right and his law. God's right as a *rector* is not founded in his will but stems from the necessary relation between God as Creator and the human being as a rational creature. Vicarious satisfaction does not violate the maintenance of the law, according to Witsius, because God interprets his law according to *epieikeia*.

*Chapter 6* further investigates the concepts of punishment and forgiveness. It is clear that according to Socinus the death of Christ needs not and cannot be regarded as a punishment. His sufferings and death were an affliction (*afflictio*), not a punishment (*poena*). Socinus asserts that it is both logically and morally impossible that God would punish Jesus. It is logically impossible because suffering can only be a punishment if that person is guilty. It is morally impossible because it is unjust to transfer punishment from a guilty person to an innocent person.

Over against this view, Grotius argues that Jesus' death must certainly be seen as a punishment. According to him, neither the logical nor the moral argument of Socinus is valid. Grotius states that innocent people can indeed be punished – a claim he substantiates with some biblical examples. Furthermore, it is not morally reprehensible when innocent people undergo punishment, if they agree to the punishment.

Grotius finds the execution of punishment in general, and the execution of the punishment of Christ specifically, justified, if this benefits the community. Punishment needs to be functional and limited to instances that obtain an advantageous effect. If the effect of punishment brings negative consequences, then the ruler is obligated not to punish. Grotius, in this way, does not use a retributive but rather a consequentialist justification of punishment. Grotius views the death of Christ as an instance of a consequentialist justification of punishment, since God demonstrates in the death of Christ his right as ruler and his abhorrence of sin, thereby motivating people to avoid sin and repent.

Regarding the definition of punishment, many Reformed theologians side with Socinus and not Grotius. Instead of adhering to a consequentialist view of punishment, they approve of a retributive view. Like Socinus, they state that it is both logically and morally impossible for an innocent person to be punished. Afflictive suffering, not based on guilt, cannot be regarded as punishment – so it is logically impossible. Likewise, it is not morally permissible to punish somebody who is innocent.

Therefore, they state that the guilt of sin had to be communicated to Christ before He could be punished. It is only possible to view Christ's suffering as punishment, both logically and morally, if the guilt has been transferred to him. This transfer of guilt took place in the imputation of the sins to Christ. Therefore, for many Reformed theologians of the seventeenth century, imputation is the indispensable condition for defending the substitutionary character of the punishment of Christ.

The concept of imputation also influences one's view of forgiveness. The idea that remission consists of not imputing sins (*non-imputatio peccatorum*) was widely accepted, both in Roman Catholic and Reformed circles. For Socinus and Grotius, that means that sins are not imputed to anyone. Sins forgiven simply stay unpunished (*impunitum*). For many Reformed theologians, however, remission means that although the sinner himself is not punished, sin is punished. In their view, sins can only be remitted after they are imputed to Christ. So, in this opinion remission of sin necessarily presupposes imputation, while for Socinus and Grotius, remission denies imputation.

In the third antinomian controversy, the neonomians side with Grotius in their view of punishment and forgiveness, though the position of Daniel Williams remains unclear. The neonomians do not make a sharp distinction between suffering and punishment, and like Grotius, they define remission as *impunitas*. The antinomians, on the other hand, adhere to the Reformed view of punishment but not of remission. Because the antinomians (as is clear from chapter 4) see the imputation of the sins to Christ as a transfer of the act of sinning, they view the remission of sin not so much as *non-imputatio* as its removal, elimination and abolishment. The faithful enjoy the remission of their sins because these sins are no longer their own sins, and having become the sins of Christ, they are abolished in his death. Conversely, Witsius held to the view of most Reformed theologians, as noted above.

*Chapter 7* takes up the concepts of justice and proportionality. Socinus' opponent, Covet, states that the sins of the faithful are imputed to Christ and that He therefore bears the punishment which follows their sins. The measure of Christ's passion must be equal to the measure of the punishment which belongs to the sins of the elect. This punishment is eternal death. It is an equivalent payment (*solutio equivalens*), in which there is a proportionality between imputed sin and punishment.

Socinus disagrees. He states that since Christ rose from the grave after three days, He did not undergo eternal death. Socinus clearly employs the idea that Christ's death was not proportional to what sins deserve as an argument against the view that sins are imputed to Christ.

Grotius' position is distinguished from both Covet and Socinus. In Grotius' view, there is no imputation and therefore no direct proportionality between sin and punishment. Therefore, according to Grotius, Christ did not undergo eternal death. However, Grotius observes a different kind of proportionality. Though Jesus' death is not a payment of the same (*solutio eiusdem*), it is a payment of something with the same value (*solutio tantidem*). For Grotius the punishment of Christ is of equal value because his death achieves the same end as would be reached if the sinner was punished in his own person – namely the maintenance of God's reign. So, Grotius argues for both the necessity of punishment as well as for the proportionality of punishment on consequentialist considerations.

Those Reformed theologians who agree with Covet, have the task of explaining how Jesus' death could be regarded as an eternal death. Here they use the distinction between arithmetic and geometric proportion, which is parallel to the respective distinction between commutative and distributive justice.

An arithmetic proportion applies to financial payments, compensation of injury, and restitution, whereas a geometric proportion applies to punishments and rewards. The main difference is that under the rubric of an arithmetic proportion, the worthiness of the person who satisfies has no influence on the worth of that which is satisfied, but in the case of a geometric proportion the worthiness of the person does have influence. Because in the death of Christ a punishment takes place, there must be a geometric proportion, according to the Reformed theologians. Since the person undergoing the punishment is the God-man (*theanthropos*), his sacrifice has an infinite value. So, the death of Christ is intensively, not extensively, proportional to the punishment that the faithful deserved. In addition, *epieikeia* plays a role because God, as ruler, has the liberty to interpret the death of Christ as a punishment that is proportional to what the law demands in case of transgressors.

In the third antinomian controversy, the neonomians adhere to the view of Grotius. They derive not only the necessity of the vicarious punishment by Christ but also the proportionality of this punishment from God's *ius rectoris*. Christ was punished enough to reach the goal aimed at in his death, that is the stability of God's reign over the world. The antinomians hold a different view, namely that Christ underwent exactly what the damned in hell have to suffer. It becomes clear that they see the death of Christ as a payment according to arithmetic proportion. His suffering was not in the first place a punishment but a compensation and restitution. The neonomians fiercely criticize that position.

The well-known discussion between Owen and Baxter about the *solutio eiusdem* and *solutio tantidem* has to be seen in the light of the question of proportionality. According to some studies (e.g., Clifford, Boersma), Owen defends an arithmetic proportion, and thus considers the sacrifice of Christ as a financial compensation, whereas Baxter pleads for a geometric proportion, seeing the sacrifice as a punishment. This interpretation, however, is incorrect, because Owen also regards the death of Christ as a punishment according to geometric proportion. Owen's critique of Baxter shows that the quantity of punishment cannot be formulated in only consequentialist terms. Owen insists that satisfaction must be equal to the punishment that the faithful would undergo, if they were punished personally. From the viewpoint of most Reformed theologians, Baxter and not Owen holds the deviant position, since Baxter interprets the proportionality of the punishment not in a retributive but a consequentialist way.

The confusion is mainly terminological in nature. Unlike Grotius and his followers, most seventeenth-century Reformed theologians argue for punishment which is retributively justified. Owen uses the term *solutio eiusdem* to underscore the retributive character, while others (like Van Mastricht) use that term only in the case of an arithmetic proportion, preferring the term *solutio tantidem* to explain that the retributive character is a geometric proportion.

Christ's exclamation of desertion in Matthew 27:46 brings a rhetorical focus to the discussion about proportionality. Calvin states that Jesus' shout was a cry of despair, which evokes a strong critique from Roman Catholic writers. According to the sixteenth-century Roman Catholic theologians, Jesus suffered primarily in his body, his soul only being influenced by the corporeal pain. The antinomians state that God repudiated his Son, as the greatest sinner, and dealt with Him as with the damned in hell. The neonomians distance themselves from the view of an arithmetic proportion. Most of the Reformed theologians state that Christ did suffer in his soul, but not extensively the same as the damned.

Witsius argues that Christ had to undergo eternal death, according to geometric proportion. Therefore, Christ's exclamation on the cross cannot be regarded as a cry of despair. He also distances himself from some of Owen's expressions, while not siding with Baxter. Witsius insists that the proportion of Christ's sufferings cannot be characterized in consequentialist terms only.

*Chapter 8* summarizes the central findings of this study and discusses their relevance. It appears that the concept of imputation is linked in many ways to the concepts of sin, right, law, punishment, forgiveness,

justice and proportionality. The interpretation of each of these concepts influences the meaning of the other. It is possible to clearly distinguish four different positions within the seventeenth-century Reformed debates about the imputation of sin to Christ, one of them being antinomianism. It is neither possible nor desirable to regard the antinomian position as only a variant of most Reformed theologians (e.g., the position of Owen).

Neonomianism distinguishes itself from Arminianism in its view of imputation. The Arminians cohere with the position of Piscator and the neonomians with the position of Wotton. What is characteristic of the third antinomian controversy, in contrast to the two earlier controversies, is not the views defended by the antinomians, but rather the development of the neonomian critique of their positions. A close analysis of Witsius' *Animadversiones* corroborates the conclusion that antinomianism, neonomianism and the position of Witsius represent three distinct positions, with the neonomians maintaining the position of Wotton and Witsius adhering to the position of Owen.

The relevance of this study demonstrates that antinomianism can best be seen as a form of repristination theology. Antinomians prefer to appeal to Reformed theologians prior to the Socinian crisis, which means that they ignore the conceptual tools developed to fight Socinianism. The Reformed and neonomian criticisms of antinomianism does not primarily stem from political or sociological causes, but *inter alia* from the fear that antinomians fuels the anti-Reformed sentiments of Roman Catholic and other opponents. Consequently, a "realistic" methodological approach does not further the study of seventeenth-century antinomianism, whereas the principle of "seeing things their way" enhances a better understanding of the antinomian debates.

In Systematic Theology, it is important to distinguish clearly the Reformed position from the antinomian position on the imputation of sin. The antinomian controversy may also provide concepts and insights for the dialogue in systematics today.

The relevance of this study is further underlined by bringing the Reformed position in the antinomian controversies in contact with the views of Nicholas Wolterstorff. It becomes evident that the conceptual framework utilized by the Reformed theologians of the seventeenth century, is richer and more comprehensive than that of Wolterstorff. They also provide a more precise description of concepts like guilt, imputation, punishment, forgiveness and sin. A more profound discussion will be possible when the current participants in the dialogues about punishment and forgiveness take note of the contributions of the seventeenth century.